OUR SHORT STORY PAGE

THE GOOD OF THE SERVICE

By Marcus Day

"WELL, Baintree, how many rifles this time?" said I, with a laugh, as I reached forth to grasp the muscular hand, the hand that, to me, seemed to have been made only to grasp the pommel of a sword. He had seen me as I came toward him; his lean length unlimbered and the hawk face lighted up pleasantly.

"How many could you deliver on the cars in your town within a week—and no questions asked?" he retorted, quickly, more than half in earnest.

Baintree, to all outward appearances, was inoffensive. Yet Germany's secret police had sent detailed reports of his movements to the Emperor in person while he was within the borders of the empire; he had been obliged to leave the Flowery Kingdom under governmental auspice; England looked upon him with disfavor because of a certain intimacy with Jameson and others in South Africa; Hawaii, when a kingdom, found reason to complain of him to the United States; Formosa knew him; Constantinople would have none of him, and when last I heard from him he was on his way to Russia—"In the hope that I may be spared to pay my respects to the Mikado," he wrote. Now, here he was seated in the lobby of the most prominent hotel in New York, undoubtedly cursing a world ungrateful enough to remain peaceful six months at a time. Baintree was possessed of a martial wanderlust.

"No," he said, in answer to my question, "I am no emissary this time. I came back to New York on personal business—family affairs, you know. Even we wanderers have family affairs sometimes. For a brief period I actually was heir to a fortune; but, alas, there were other heirs who thought I had no right to the shekels, and, sooner than have trouble in the family, I chucked the whole matter up and left them to fight it out among themselves."

This was not wholly the truth. I afterward learned that there were two other beneficiaries under the will of his aunt (it was a spinster aunt who had willed him her property), and when Baintree discovered that one was a cripple, he abdicated his claim because "there was only enough for one." It was characteristic of him. He told me he was just waiting to hear from "certain quarters," and confidently expected that "something might turn up."

"Keep your weather eye peeled, Colin," he said, with his queer grating laugh, "or you may miss the opportunity of disposing of another big consignment of those very bad rifles of yours."

This always was his joke. Twice he had suddenly appeared on Broadway, had paid cash down for stock rifles to be delivered in a certain time—always in a hurry—and the last time, so he jokingly insists, the rifles we sent him did more damage to their owners than to the enemy.

It soon developed that he had nothing to do for the evening except contain his soul in patience, and, as I had concluded my business, we arranged for a quiet visit. A chance inquiry about a mutual friend brought forth the story of the last of his many queer adventures.

"Carstairs? Yes, he's still attached to the embassy at Tokio. I saw him there a few months ago. By the way, Colin, you remember Lombard, the correspondent who went with me to Central America when—that time? Undoubtedly you read of his death? Shot down in the streets of Tokio in a drunken brawl, the dispatches said, and the Foreign Office substantiated this version after careful investigation."

There was a world of contempt and sarcasm in the last two words. I nodded. I remembered the story well, for it had created considerable comment in official circles here.

"Well, that was a lie; one of many," he went on, settling himself in his chair. "To give you the inside history of that affair, I will go back a bit; back to Mukden, in fact, just after the Japs occupied the city. The siege lasted—how many weeks was it? The exact time escapes me now, but it was a long time. You can imagine the turmoil and confusion in that half-starved city, with every man looking out for himself, and the devil take the hindmost.

"Undoubtedly it would have gone hard with me had there been anyone on the field staff who remembered me. That little affair—you remember! As it was, I would have had a hard time explaining why I, an American, bore arms for Russia, had it not been for Lombard. He was out there for a New York newspaper, as you know; was caught with the forces in the city, and couldn't get out. When he learned of my predicament, he gave me the credentials of an artist who had roomed with him and who had gone down to the coast before the fuss started about the town. That made me safe enough, provided that I was not recognized. When we had been investigated and received our passes from headquarters, we had the run of the town. It was in one of our nocturnal rambles that we met the girl—yes, there's a girl in this story; she's the story. It was at night, as I say, that we met the girl for the first time.

"There were few vehicles left in the town, and most of those that were left were being hurried toward the front as provision carts. So when we heard the rumble of wheels at that time of night, and saw a real, though dilapidated brougham, drawn by a pair of horses that evidently had been requisitioned from the artillery, harness and all, we were somewhat surprised.

"When the brougham was not more than a hundred feet away there was a shot; the off-horse stumbled and fell. Then there was a scurry of feet and a number of dark forms perhaps ten or twelve, rushed toward the carriage. Surprise after surprise. There was a woman's scream, suddenly stifled, and, by common impulse, Lombard and I drew our guns and ran toward the disturbance. Lombard fired on the run and downed one man on the outskirts of the little crowd. I opened up, and both of us emptied six shots into the mass before it broke. Even in the heat of the moment I

"HANDED HER INTO THEIR CARRIAGE."

was forced to note the accuracy of the return fire; when I came to think it over, I—well, anyway, it was good shooting, for I had several close calls and Lombard was scratched twice. There were several dark forms on the ground, when, obeying a sharp command which seemed to come from the carriage itself, the bunch scattered. One of the forms proved to be the girl; she had fainted.

"Lombard picked her up and carried her to the brougham, and, as he was about to put her in, he stopped with an exclamation of surprise. I looked over his shoulder and there on the seat inside, as calm and collected as you are now, sat one of the Jap officers on the general staff—one that came on with fresh troops for garrison duty only two or three days before.

"'Well, by thunder!' said Lombard in English, 'this infernal scoundrel sat here and didn't lift a finger to help the girl.'

"He went on with more in the same strain, for he was very impulsive, Lombard was, never thinking that the Jap officer understood English. What he said wouldn't look well in print, and I'll bet you, or any other man with a drop of good, red blood in his veins, would have shot him in his tracks for the half of it. But the Jap sat there mute in the semi-gloom until Lombard stopped for breath; then he moved a bit on the seat.

"'If you have quite finished,' he said in excellent English, 'you may place the young lady on the seat. Then direct the patrol this way, if you will be so kind, so that we may get on.'

"Lombard was thunderstruck. He stood with his foot on the step, the girl resting partly on his knee as he held her in his arms. After a time he spoke.

"'Understand that I retract nothing, you cowardly cur,' he said, and began hurling epithets at him.

"There was no use in making a bad matter worse, so I interrupted him. The patrol, attracted by the shots, was coming along, anyway, and I thought it was time we were moving. Understand, neither of us had seen what the girl was like up to this time. One of the lap robes of the brougham had been thrown over her head, and though Lombard had pulled it aside when he picked her up, yet her face was in shadow. She gave a long sigh just about then and struggled to rise. Lombard spoke to her in English to soothe her, just as he had spoken to the Jap officer at first, not knowing or caring whether she understood. So that both of us were surprised again when she spoke.

"'Let me down, please,' she said in English, too, and as clamly as if she had requested a drink of water. 'There is no further need of holding me; I have quite recovered.'

"'American, by the Lord!' cried Lombard, in his impulsive way; then, as the corporal in charge of the patrol squad came up with his lantern, and we saw her face: 'No, English; I'll be damned.'

"'You may be damned,' said she, and she actually laughed; 'but I'm neither one—just cosmopolitan.'

"She stepped into the brougham, and once again Lombard allowed his impulses to run away with him.

"'You don't mean to say that you are going on with him when he—' he began, passionately.

"'Hush!' cried the girl, and she put out her hand and covered his mouth, her face suddenly grown serious. 'I heard you—I was conscious—and you've said more than enough now. You're a brave man, colonel—'"

Baintree stopped abruptly at my look of wonder. "Yes," he said, "she called him colonel, though he never knew why, and—but that came later." Then he went on:

"'You're a brave man, colonel,' the girl repeated, 'and I love you for it; but don't be foolhardy. It's your reputation, I know, but for this once, for my sake, forgo it. I thank you for what you and your friend have done, and you may be sure I shall not forget it.'

"By this time a new horse—I don't know where it came from—was in the traces, and they moved on."

Baintree leaned back in his chair and again filled his pipe.

"There never was a minute after that," he continued, after he had smoked for some time in retrospective silence, "so long as we remained in Mukden, that we were not under surveillance.

"Only a few days later we were courteously but very pointedly informed that the good of the service required our presence in Tokio.

"We went to Tokio; there was no help for it. I made a tentative proposal looking toward America, but they laughed at me. We were treated well—and constantly watched. One day Lombard returned to our hotel flushed and excited.

"'I've seen her, John,' he cried, hardly waiting to get inside the door. 'I've seen her—in a carriage—with that cur again—and she saw me and turned pale—and he saw me and scowled—and—and—and—say, what the devil do you make out of this, anyway?'

"Naturally, I needed no explanation. I waited until he had calmed down a bit, and then we talked it over. By this time, of course, I had some suspicion as to why we were watched. But I did not tell Lombard.

"When we received invitations to one of the jubilee functions ordered by the Court, I should have been warned.

"The event was one that called out the best the capital afforded. Royalty was represented, the military and the diplomatic corps turned out en masse, and there were a few especially favored foreigners like ourselves. Lombard was openly happy when finally the girl put in an appearance, followed by the inevitable Jap, who was none other than the colonel again. She bowed to us graciously, but try as we might, we never could get close to her. Once she smiled in a hopeless sort of way and shrugged her pretty shoulders when she saw we were watching. Finally, though it was early, she and her escort rose to leave. At the doorway she turned for an instant, looked directly toward where we were standing, and motioned with her head, a barely discernible movement. It was enough for Lombard.

"I followed him, naturally, and when we reached the head of the stairway we saw the Jap officer handing her into their carriage. She looked up at us, nodded and smiled. Lombard flushed like a schoolboy, and with a schoolboy's impetuosity he rushed down the stairway and across to the driveway.

"He had almost reached the carriage when there was a flash and a report from the dark interior, and poor Lombard plunged forward on his face and lay motionless. I think, perhaps, I lost my head then; in any event, I, like an inexperienced boy, unarmed as I was, rushed to the carriage.

"'Fool! Fool!' I heard the girl say in shrill anger, unmindful of the ears that might hear; 'he is not the one. It is the other, the man with the beard.'

"There was another flash from the carriage, and—well, this red welt at the neckband of my shirt attests the Jap's markmanship. The driver whipped up his team and the carriage dashed madly away before I could reach it.

"Poor Lombard never knew what hit him. There was noise, and the police, and all the rest of it. I could do him no good by remaining, and I had my own neck to save; so I made away in the confusion and gained the hotel without hindrance. Then came Carstairs, horrified, to know what action they should take. I told him the whole story, and he agreed with me that I was in a tight hole. You see, Carstairs, whose frivolity is but a cloak, knew the old story, too. I went with him to the embassy, was sworn in as one of the secretaries the same day, which was Tuesday, and was ordered home on Thursday, a half-hour before the boat sailed."

Baintree laughed, a low, bitter, grating laugh; arose and paced up and down the room with nervous strides. Perhaps I may have been a trifle stupid, but I didn't fully grasp the salient points; I couldn't discover a motive, and after racking my brain for a time, I told Baintree that I couldn't understand.

"Of course, of course," he said, running his fingers through his hair; there was a vague, impersonal note in his voice. "How should you know? Years ago, just after China had been beaten, I was ordered to leave the country because they thought I was—well, that's immaterial; they got all my papers then, but they couldn't take what I carried away in my head. Had Russia been able to get within their boundaries—but that, too, is immaterial. They are wise, those Japs, and they'll not chance a war with Uncle Sam—not yet. If I were to die in an accident—or a 'drunken brawl,' as did poor Lombard, whom that blundering ass mistook for me, why, that would be the end."

"But Carstairs knew about Lombard's death; why didn't he—"

"Carstairs is a diplomat, Colin."

"But the girl, Baintree," I cried in despair; "what of her? Surely she was not—"

"The girl, my boy," he said, wearily patient, "is one of the most valuable assets of their secret service. And what they think I know is a menace to the 'good of the service.' Let's go to bed."

The Rector's Fee

By Blanche I. Goell

THE rector was weary and worn. He sat at his study table, and a deep wrinkle made a furrow between his fine eyes. It was not his Sunday sermon which occasioned his worry. Oh, no! That was neatly written and safely tucked away in a pigeonhole of his desk. The rector's head rested upon his hands and his gaze fell downward on a little pile of papers. To tell the truth, they were bills. Yes, bills. Bills for coal, and bills for light, and bills for food. It was amazing how they mounted up. For the rector lived very simply and all alone, save for his old servant, Hannah, and the forlorn waifs of society whom he insisted upon bringing home to feed and shelter until he could set them on their feet. But the rector did not remember these visitors, and old Hannah, who sputtered and grumbled over each new one, was not there at the moment to remind him. So the rector puzzled over the exorbitant amount that it took to provide a man with the mere necessities. For the only luxury the rector allowed himself was an occasional new book.

Then his lips broke into a little smile. Those dear parishioners of his! They had called him to be the head of a big church in a big city. The city was big enough to have a very big slum district. That was the thing the rector could not forget. He bent all his energies toward its betterment. And those dear parishioners!—they were not very rich, but they did their best. They always had some subscription paper going the rounds, and they always brought it to the rector to head with his signature and approval. And the rector always did. He read the pathetic announcement, listened to the heartrending tale, and invariably seized his pen to put himself down as the first subscriber. That was where the trouble lay; the rector was too generous. But he would never have believed you if you had told him that.

His fingers hovered above the little silver bell. He would ring for Hannah, and together they would discuss the possibility of lessening such appalling consumption of butter and sugar and coffee. But at that moment Hannah herself appeared in the doorway and saved him the trouble.

"There's a couple out here who want to be married, sir," she announced.

"Show them in, Hannah, show them in," said the rector, cheerily, and waited for the approach of the wedding party.

Piloted by Hannah, they came. The rector surveyed them keenly. The prospective groom was of decided Hebraic countenance; his race could not be mistaken. But the woman was not of his race. She was perhaps thirty years old, not pretty, but with a face which interested the clergyman at once. It was a face such as he liked—plain and strong and good.

He asked the preliminary questions, satisfied himself as to the propriety of the marriage, brought forth his register and proceeded with the ceremony.

Isaac Borofsky beamed radiantly as the clergyman pronounced the couple man and wife. He turned to his bride as if to kiss her. And then he hesitated. His hand sought his trousers pocket, and he brought forth a little bag. It was made of cheap black cloth, gathered together at the top by a string. Something jingled as he put it on the table. The rector, hearing the rattle of the coin and watching the triumphant satisfaction upon the Jew's face, decided that the sum-total of the jingling coin might amount to a dollar. But he thanked the bridegroom very courteously.

The groom, turning again for the consummation of the deferred kiss, knocked the little bag from the table. It was quite by accident. But the little bag fell to the floor, the string which gathered the top burst, and the coins fell upon the floor. They were very bright and yellow and shiny. The rector thought they were new coppers.

"Mein Gott!" exclaimed the bridegroom, and once more the nuptial kiss was deferred, as he groped upon the floor. The coins were recovered. There were five of them in all. Puffing and panting from his exertions, he rose to his feet and laid the coins upon the table. The rector's eyes grew big with astonishment. They were twenty-dollar gold pieces—and five of them!

The impatient groom was preparing once more for the first kiss, but the rector seized him by the arm.

"My dear sir, you must have made a mistake. Those are twenty-dollar gold pieces."

Isaac Borofsky turned with a little sigh of regret, though his eyes beamed with complacent satisfaction.

"Dat iss right," he agreed. "I know it."

The rector cast a look of perplexity upon him. The donor of this wealth did not look opulent; his clothes were very plain and inconspicuous. "It is too much," he said, gently, and waved his hand with a little gesture of refusal. "I could not accept such a fee from you. It would be too much to take even one of these ccins. It would not be right."

Mr. Borofsky laid both hands upon his wife, one upon each arm. But he turned his head and looked at the rector steadily. "It iss got money," he said, solemnly. "It iss ein hundert dollar. But I gif it to you. I—Isaac Berofsky—I can afford it. Und mein frau—" He turned from the rector and gazed at his wife; then he bent forward and secured the longed-for kiss with a sigh of rapture. Then he looked around. "Una mein frau Maria is worth it."

The gold pieces were a veritable godsend to the rector. He settled all the household bills, which, after all, were not so very large, provided homeward passage for a sick old Irish woman, rescued a forlorn little street urchin from starvation and set him up as a bootblack, with a chance to go to night school. He revelled in a hundred little deeds of charity, for the parishioners, though they were generous and thoughtful—dear, good people, every one of them—did not make his Discretionary Fund big enough to honor all his drafts.

It was two weeks from the evening when the rector had married Isaac Borofsky. He sat at his desk and read the appeal for the Support of Blind Babies. His tender heart was touched. The stories were heartrending. He wanted to help them so much. But, alas! the Discretionary Fund was empty.

With the brusqueness of an old and privileged domestic, Hannah appeared at the doorway.

"That man is out here," she announced; "the man you married two weeks ago. He wishes to see you."

"Show him in, Hannah," directed the rector. But his mind was not as calm as his tone. Of course the man had come back for his money. He ought never to have accepted it. It was too much. But he had taken it; and worse, he had spent it! The rector grew as red as if he had been guilty of an actual theft. Great beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead. It would be a long time before he could refund that dreadful hundred dollars.

The door opened and Isaac Borofsky sauntered in. There was a jubilant swagger in his gait, a triumphant complacency in his face. But the poor rector was too nervous to see this. He was only aware of a vengeful Shylock demanding the restoration of his ducats.

Mr. Borofsky advanced steadily to the middle of the room. He wrung the rector's outstretched hand vigorously. His thick lips parted in an ingratiating smile. Matrimony had not robbed him of his suavity.

"How iss you, Herr Doctor?" he inquired, cheerfully. "Perhaps you does not remember me. I am Isaac Borofsky. You gifs me the honor to marry

"THE BRIDEGROOM GROPED UPON THE FLOOR."

me—ach, Himmel! it is just two weeks this night. Do you remember?"

"Yes, I recall," answered the unhappy clergyman. Those hateful gold coins seemed to rattle over the floor again. He wished he had never seen them. But, then!—they had sent the old Irish woman home to die in peace in the mother-country; they had started little Pete with a clean bill in life; they had done so much! And now this man wanted them back.

"Do you remember the moneys that I gif you? The gold coins? The hundert dollar?" pursued the inexorable interrogator.

"I remember." The thread that suspended the sword of Damocles was about to break.

"I tells you Maria was wort it. Ach, I was wrong! I made one mistake! I think Maria was a good woman. Ach Himmel! I did not know her!" The speaker breathed a deep sigh. One fat hand sought his trousers' pocket. Out came another little black bag, a duplicate of the first. Something jingled as he thrust it into the clergyman's hand. "Du lieber Gott! mein frau—my Maria iss one angel. Ein hundert dollar! She is worth more. Isaac Borofsky is honest. He pays for what he gets. She is better than I knew. Ein hundert dollar! It is much! I thought it was enough. Himmel! It is not so. It is too little. I bring you ein other hundert dollar. Take it! Maria is worth it!"

And that was how the rector was able to head the subscription for the Blind Babies with a generous sum.